

Postal Regulatory Commission
Submitted 3/20/2017 1:47:12 PM
Filing ID: 99515
Accepted 3/20/2017

USPS conducts 'kaizen' studies of newspaper flows

'Value-stream mapping' finds mailer, postal errors

The U.S. Postal Service, acting in response to National Newspaper Association publisher complaints, and under pressure to improve rural service, has conducted nine short-term "kaizen" projects of NNA-member newspapers. "Kaizen" is the Japanese term for "continuous improvement."

Postmaster General Megan Brennan responded to complaints at last March's NNA Leadership Summit in Washington, and initiatives to require

measurement of rural mail service for the first time ever, led by NNA Chief Executive Officer Tonda Rush with the Postal Regulatory Commission and Congress.

Working through USPS Chief Operating Officer David Williams, key staffers of headquarters Operations Integration and Support,

led by Dane Coleman, were asked to conduct "Value-Stream Mapping" projects at titles suggested by NNA's Postal Committee and board. This mapping entailed following newspapers from the mail preparation point through truck trips to handling at one or more postal processing plants up the line. The SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely) goal was "to reduce newspaper-related complaints by 50 percent immediately in fiscal year 2015."

Paul Mitchell and Chung Kim conducted a national webinar for hundreds of postal processing personnel on OMX processing, discussed below, in which Periodicals travel on First-Class truck trips (ideally in flats trays, or tubs).

Some were led by headquarters teams, others by district teams. NNA had only been given access to three headquarters-team PowerPoint reports at deadline for this column. I am sharing five examples of problems on both sides the equation, mail preparation and postal processing, below, to give members a flavor of what can go wrong where.

USEFUL FINDINGS FOR OTHER NEWSPAPERS

1. Switching to 24-digit barcode pink labels on the flats trays was a needed conversion at one newspaper, which found it was available in the presort software but hadn't yet been asked to implement. These are needed for Full-Service mailings using the Intelligent Mail barcode.

2. One newspaper, prepared in bundles in APCs (All-Purpose Containers, wire cages on wheels termed "rolling



Chung Kim, a mail operations expert from USPS Headquarters in Washington, got a bird's eye view on the challenges in getting local newspapers to their readers through the mail system when he flew to Bruce, Mississippi, to meet with publisher Lisa McNiece. The Calhoun County Journal, owned by Lisa and her husband, Joel, was the subject of the latest of the "kaizen" studies done by USPS at the request of NNA. The purpose of the studies is to uncover opportunities in mail preparation and processing that will help speed newspapers to their readers on time.

stock" inside postal plants), had too many copies sorting to Origin Mixed ADC, which were eligible to go directly to plants serving larger population centers with significant customers. This was the source of delivery complaints, which the newspaper was receiving.

The solution took two steps. (1) Setting larger weights for bundles outside-county than inside-county. Postmasters wanted 15-piece bundles destined to in-county, for weight and handling purposes of this paper that usually ran more than 1 pound with inserts, but there was no need to similarly restrict the size for outside county bundles. And (2) working with the software vendor to ensure grouping of all available copies within particular Area Distribution Center plants, regardless of minimum bundle size rules, to allow building of separate APCs for each

ADC to shuttle from the paper's Sectional Center Facility directly to those ADCs. This was deemed a win-win for both the newspaper and USPS.

Because any mailing is likely to produce residual copies to OMX because of current sortation rules, NNA has requested a rules change to eliminate minimums at ADCs and SCFs that force pieces away from the best-possible sort.

3. Mailroom employees of the outside printer/printer of a weekly title were overlooking hashtags (####) on paper mailing labels that indicate ZIP Code and route bundle changes, resulting in multiple 5-digit ZIPs in one bundle. The result was that some copies went missing for a while, as they were routed to the wrong post office for distribution. The daily newspaper mailroom had less experience handling mailed newspapers and was missing these

despite the hashtags being circled in red by the newspaper after labels were printed. One FIRM bundle was missing, although there was an extra 5-digit bundle. The plant was provided with a set of sortation statistics as a guide to proper preparation to match up with flats tray tags.

4. The newspaper's arrival at its origin-entry post office must be in time to get on the truck to its SCF by 6 p.m. to maximize earliest outbound truck trips. This was not usually a problem but was listed as a reminder.

5. Mail preparers at a distant print/mail site sometime put bundles into the wrong container. Newspapers must provide such mailrooms with a sort scheme specific to each week's edition and ask that it be followed precisely.

NOTE: NNA is holding a seminar during the Community Newspaper Leadership Summit in Washington March 16-18 for mail preparers of community newspapers. We hope printer/mailers will attend and that newspapers will encourage theirs to do so. Joint postal/NNA leaders will be presenters.

OTHER FINDINGS OF IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED WITHIN USPS PROCESSING PLANTS

1. Revise the truck schedule for the last trip leaving an SCF to depart earlier to provide more processing time at the ADC serving much of the state to allow more handling time to improve delivery.

2. Color code the manual case in the SCF with color dots to simplify the breakdown.

3. Newspapers were being dispatched on the last trip from the SCF to the larger ADC processing plant some distance away. It was recommended that newspapers be sent on every trip to the ADC, thereby ensuring copies of this and other weeklies from within the SCF were moved earlier. In addition, one Gaylord (large cardboard container) was identified at the origin-entry post office for cross-docking at the SCF (now a Hub under national plant consolidations). Internally, the plant was asked to use "MTEL" placards for better identification and handling. Also, the 1700 (5 p.m. trip) to the ADC was moved back a half hour to 17:30 to get more newspaper volume on the ADC trip.

4. Mixed ADC newspapers for sorting at distant plant were omitted from an earlier truck that was full. Containers were consolidated to make room on the 0100 (1 a.m.) trip for improved service. Parcels were getting priority over NEWS matter (Periodicals) in convention to processing rules. This was fixed, and tour or shift managers were made responsible for compliance.

5. Plant personnel failed to place a time stamp on container's receipt, increasing the possibility of delays. © Max Heath 2015

MAX HEATH, NNA Postal chair, is a postal consultant for Athlon Media Group (Parade, American Profile, Relish, Spry Living, TV Times and Athlon Sports magazines) and Landmark Community Newspapers LLC. E-mail maxheath@lcn.com.